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ABSTRACT

This study examined why students decide to enter teaching as a profession through a survey of college students majoring in education at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. The study used triangulation with a data search, an anonymous survey, and an open-ended questionnaire. The 100 surveys were distributed randomly to junior and senior education students. The results were as follows: (1) most students chose teaching in order to make a positive difference in the lives of children; (2) 92 percent chose teaching because they loved children; (3) calendar considerations were important to only 5 percent; (4) 98 percent felt that teaching would allow them to express their creative abilities; (5) 87 percent saw teaching as an awesome responsibility; (6) 58 percent disagreed that a 3-month vacation was a reason for choosing a teaching career; (7) 24 percent thought that teaching was a highly respected profession; (8) 92 percent thought teachers are not adequately paid; (9) 61 percent strongly felt that the rewards of teaching are not monetary; and (10) 32 percent had a teacher-parent and 54 percent were influenced to become a teacher by one of their own former teachers. Also included are the survey instruments and survey results in tables. (Contains 17 references.) (JB)

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ED 366 234

STUDENTS' REASONS FOR ENTERING THE EDUCATIONAL PROFESSION

By

SANDRA HAYES

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1990

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT Public confidence in educators is erroneously being erroded, yet, in spite of the existing conditions, various students continue to make teaching their chosen profession. It was the purpose of this study to examine the reasons for students' decisions to enter the field of education. The data search and surveys conducted during this research collaborate the indication that education majors are selecting teaching as a profession primarily for altruistic reasons.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The media informs the public, through seemingly daily broadcast commentaries, of the need to revamp the present educational system. The focal point of this outcry is most generally directed toward the teacher, who this researcher feels is often the brunt of many false accusations. Public confidence in educators is erroneously being erroded, student achievement scores are below expectations, there is an exorbitant amount of concern for time-on-task and accountability, merit pay and policy making have greatly stiffled creativity for both learner and teacher.

The Oklahoma Observer, January 10, 1990, published an article on the current conditions of education in Oklahoma. We are "...48th in teacher salaries, 46th in what we spent on a pupil's education in the public schools (and) 47th in higher education..." according to the editor, Frosty Troy.

In spite of the existing conditions, various students continue to make teaching their chosen profession. It is the purpose of this study to examine the reasons for the students' decisions to enter the field of education.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant task for students completing their high school education is determining what they will do during the next stage of their lives. For some, choosing an occupation and finding their first full-time job will be the major immediate challenges. For others, choosing a college and selecting a particular course of study will constitute the major decision making goals at this stage. Clearly, no matter which path students choose to follow beyond high school, this is a time for important career decisions to be weighed and implemented.

One of the most disappointing findings by Richard Noeth, 1984, was the relatively low level of help students indicated receiving from counselors. Nearly half of the students felt that counselors were not helpful to them in making career decisions. This was also reflected by a national survey of parents (Gallup 1979). Another interpretation of this finding might be that counselors, rather than working directly with students, have served more as facilitators of career development experiences.

Despite the fact that these decisions like most in life are not irrevocable, they do carry with them a certain

amount of pressure. This pressure is generated by expectations of parents and educators, as well as a spectrum of peer group anxieties tied to an unfortunate lack of reality testing. Certain experiences, such as interesting classes, extra curricular and out-of-school activities, and the results of various tests also often have a role in influencing the outcome of these career decisions.

Most studies of student attitudes toward teaching have been general in nature and have not focused specifically on a content area. Langston (1951) surveyed students in grades six through twelve and found that attitudes toward teaching as a career become less favorable as the students increased in age. Oliver (1986) determined physical education and mathematics teaching were given much higher ratings than teaching of other subjects but students did not see teaching as being either a well paid or an enjoyable profession.

High school students also rated friends, high school grades and test scores highly in terms of helpfulness in the career decision making process. Given the importance of high school to college transistion, peer interaction concerning possible future plans would be expected to be significant. Generally, college students have reported teachers as major role influences (Tidball 1973; Bascow & Howe 1979).

The prestige value that students assign to teaching may influence not only their willingness to explore education as

a potential career but also their eventual decision to obtain the degree and certification necessary.

Occupational prestige is the position of an occupation relative to other occupations. Most members of a society have a general notion of prestige and this determines the degree of difference which they accord to individuals on the basis of their membership of an occupation. Groff (1962) determined the prestige of teaching as an occupation dropped from 46 percent in 1947 to 26 percent in 1963, below the elite professions of medicene and law.

The idea that different occupations have different status or prestige value has intrigued psychologists, sociologists and others for many years (Caplow 1954; Hall 1915). The specific importance of this concept is that students are likely to be attracted to occupations that offer the potential for meeting their status needs and repelled by those that do not.

The rewards of an occupation with higher prestige are substantial, not only in terms of the esteem accorded to the individual by others, but also due to material benefits that typically accrue to individuals holding such positions. According to Hall (1975) occupational identification has replaced other status fixing attributes in the social structure such as ancestry, political affiliation and personal character.

The social status rankings of twenty five occupations

reveal that teachers have maintained a ranking from positions 4-8 in a grouping of 1-25 for the years encompassing the period of 1925-1982 (Chapman 1982).

Teaching is by far the largest of those occupations which lay claim to professional status. The size of the teaching force may detract from the status of teaching. There is no inherent reason why this should be but perhaps two factors operate. One is that the large size probably depresses salary levels compared with the small elite professions and salary levels is, in turn, likely to have a reciprocal effect on status; high salary bestows high status which commands high salary.

Secondly there is a far higher proportion of women in teaching than in any of the high-status professions and it is possible that this affects the status of the profession as a whole. Insofar as teaching may be regarded by the general population as "women's work," and insofar as the status of women' employment generally has been considered lower status than that of men, teaching may therefore suffer. The teacher's immediate clients are dependent and immature and may be one of the determinants of the teacher's status. Other professionals have children as clients but their clientele does not usually consist exclusively of children. In a sense, the teacher is not wholly of the adult world and status may thus be depressed.

In its broadest sense, teacher supply means the number

of people who, under certain conditions would be choosing teaching as a career. This choice will depend on a number of factors which can be usefully grouped into two divisions. First, pecuniary factors such as the rate of pay, the expected growth of these rates, and the certainty with which work is available. Second, nonpecuniary factors such as the characteristics of the job, the social status attatched to it and the environment in which it will be performed. The economics of teacher supply concerns the analysis of the way in which the first group of factors will affect the proportion of people who decide to offer their services to teaching. This does not imply that economists consider the second group of factors irrelevant but they can concentrate their attention on the effect of pecuniary circumstances.

Economists have usually studied the decision to become a teacher within the theoretical framework of occupational choice (Ethington & Wolfe (1988). This problem has featured in the literature for years. The basic assumption is that a person will train for a given occupation if the expected net returns from doing so are greater than those from any other alternative.

The empirical work in this area (Ethington 1988) has shown that this effect is significant but prospective teachers are sensitive to many other influencing factors. Males were very sensitive to salaries and career prospects of pecuniary concerns but females were much more influenced

by other factors.

Substantial research suggests that the teaching profession attracts men and women who desire intrinsic rewards and who approach teaching as a calling. In Growing Minds: On Becoming a Teacher, Kohl (1984) fervently stated:

> "I believe that the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others. Some people teach in order to dominate others or to support work the'd rather do or simply to earn a living. But, I'm not talking about the job of teaching so much as the calling to teach. Most teachers I know, even the most demoralized ones, who drag themselves to oppressive and mean schools where their work is not respected and their presence not welcome, have felt the calling at some time in their lives."

Thomas (1984) determined that the factors influencing respondents were altruistic: "The desire to work with children and the desire to impart knowledge." Lortie (1975) identified five major attractions of teaching: the desire to work with young people: teaching is a valuable service of moral worth; fondness for the school setting as a

medium for expressing interests; job security; preference for hours and vacations.

Ethington (1988) confirmed many of Lortie's (1975) five attractive areas. They report that ninety seven percent agreed that working with children was the major reason for selecting teaching as a profession. Ninety percent agreed upon teaching as a service and seventy nine percent felt job security was a major consideration but only forty eight eight percent felt time compatability was a major factor.

Lortie (1975) reasoned that men and women approached teaching from different points in the social system. He found that thirty nine percent of the women as compared to thirteen percent of the men agreed that "my parents think it is a good career choice." Many male students indicated that teaching was a second choice of career because their first choice was too expensive in training. Eighty eight percent of the females said teaching was their first career choice.

The academic qualifications of teachers (Tidball 1973) are everywhere considerably higher than most other occupations and are also higher than the social service occupations with which comparison is likely. This final comparison brings the literature review full circle. What are the reasons given by today's education majors for selecting teaching as their profession?

CHAPTER III

HYPOTHESIS

According to the January 10, 1990 edition of the Oklahoma Observer, Oklahoma ranks 48th in teacher salaries, 46th in per pupil expenditure and 47th in funding for higher education. The media is constantly informing the public of the currently "failing" educational system and comparing its lack of success to the success of its counterpart in foreign countries. Bad press, low salaries, scarce funding and a dubious sense of public and parental support tend to be the norm regarding the educational situation at the present time.

Given the facts of this situation it is extremely difficult to rationalize why a college student, with numerous and desirable career possibilities, would choose to major in education and make teaching a career. That is the reason this research was initiated without a hypothesis. Researcher bias would hope that the reasons for teaching would be altruistic regardless of the existing conditions, be they desirable or undesirable in nature.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

This research project was conducted on the campus of a small university in Oklahoma and participants of the research were college students majoring in education.

Triangulation was the process used for this project. A data search, anonymous survey and an open-ended questionnaire were the three specific methods used.

Anonymity of the respondents was a prime consideration because this researcher is also a member of the faculty at this university. It was important that the respondents participate in a nonthreatening situation, free of reprisal, and that they be assured their reponses would be completely confidential. Extra caution was exercised to achieve these goals. Colleagues of the researcher assisted in the distribution of the questionnaires so the identity of the researcher would not be a variable affecting responses.

One hundred anonymous surveys and twenty five open-ended questionnaires were distributed to education students during class. The surveys were distributed at random but the open-ended questonnaires were distributed only to juniors and seniors. After the students completed the instruments, one student collected the instruments, placed

them in an envelop and took them to the education office secretary. At no time did any faculty member have an opportunity to view their students' responses.

Replication of this study might include personal interviews which could provide the researcher with very helpful information and additional insights. This method was not an option to this researcher at this campus for reasons of respondent anonymity as previously stated.

Additional data could have easily be gathered with addemdums to the questions on the survey. Indication as to gender and age of the respondent and reasons why education was not the first choice should be included in any follow-up study thus providing additional tools for interpretation. Identification by the respondents of the one determing factor in their selection of teaching as a profession was not a question on the survey that was used, however, this study could have been more conclusive toward one specific determing factor influencing students toward their decision to teach had it been asked. In the interest of repondents' response time for answering the questionnaire, the particular questions needed to acquire the data in question were omitted. This study was able to glean much valuable data indicating the prime factors to be altruistic, however, with the afore mentioned changes the conclusions may have been less general and more specific.

Researching this area of study has opened the door to

vast possibilities for future studies. It is with regret that this researcher recognizes the limitations that calendar restraints have placed upon the results of this study. It is hoped that future investigations will be conducted.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF DATA

D. C. Lortie found five major areas of attraction to the teaching profession in his 1975 project. The open-ended questionnaire used in this project also revealed five major areas of attraction. Lortie's conclusions revealed that ninety seven percent agreed that working with children was the major reason for selecting teaching as a profession. The most frequently mentioned reason for selecting teaching as a career was the desire to make a positive difference in the lives of children. This researcher's survey revealed that ninety six percent of the respondents felt they could make a difference in the lives of their students.

The second most frequently mentioned reason was the love of children. Ninety two percent of the respondents gave this as a reason for becoming a teacher. Lortie discovered ninety percent of his respondents viewed teaching as a service of worth and this was the second most frequently stated reason for entering the teaching field.

Lortie (1975) also discovered seventy nine percent of his respondents felt that teaching offered the job security that they felt to be important. However, in the survey this researcher conducted, job security was never once mentioned

as a reason for teaching. Forty eight percent of Lortie's respondents felt time compatability was a major factor, however, this researcher observed only five percent of the respondents indicating calendar considerations to be important. The data search revealed a definite trend of students to place high priority on the school setting as a medium for expression of interests. Ninety eight percent of the students in this survey indicated they felt that teaching would give them an opportunity to express their creative abilities.

This study reveals that eighty seven percent of the future teachers feel that teaching is an awesome responsibility and ninety three percent strongly disagree that teaching is an easy, 8:30-3:00 job. Fifty eight percent strongly disagreed that a three month vacation was the reason for choosing teaching as a career.

Eighty four of the respondents strongly disagreed that education requirements for graduation are less rigorous than those for other areas.

The teaching profession does not now enjoy the respect it once had was strongly supported by fifty eight percent of the students and only twenty four percent strongly agreed that teaching is a highly respected profession.

Ninety two percent of the future teachers strongly agreed that teachers are not adequately paid and sixty one percent strongly felt that the rewards of teaching are not

monetary.

The decision to become a teacher being entirely their own was supported by sixty percent of the students, however, thirty two percent admitted to having a teacher-parent who influenced that decision and fifty four percent agreed they were influenced by a former teacher.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The data search and surveys collaborate the indication that education majors are selecting teaching as a profession primarily for altruistic reasons.

A clear majority of the students indicated their love of children and being a positive influence in their lives as a primary factor. They felt that teaching was a personally gratifying career where they would be able to express their creative abilities. Sharing their content knowledge with children was a task that not everyone is capable of doing well.

Although some chose teaching because it was a respected field, many felt that the public did not now hold the profession in as high esteem as it had previously. Many considered teaching to be a very demanding and exhausting job for which they would not be adequately compensated.. Even though the educational requirements for graduation were not considered to be less rigorous than those for other occupations, they agreed the salaries they would receive as teachers would be less than many other occupations.

Valuable data could be obtained by extending this study to include responses from college students on a state-wide

basis. Comparisons could be made between the states or between geographical locations nationally.

A major concern for educational organizations is the retention of public school teachers. The annual separation rate for teachers is a high 12.4 percent, relative to other professional occupations such as dentists (.4 %), engineers (6.9%), lawyers (5.7%), registered nurses (7.6%). (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1988). The St. Louis Metropolitan Schools revealed a mean seven year survival rate for teachers who began teaching between 1969 and 1976 (Mark 1985). Also problematic is the loss of teachers because of career change, an option eventually pursued by one of every four teachers.

Career opportunities have expanded and diversified and the best and brightest among college educated blacks and women have turned to more lucrative and more prestigious careers than teaching (Sykes 1983). Students choosing careers other than teaching may be responding to the perception of reality that teaching does not provide opportunities for leadership, advancement, money, power, influence or autonomy. One model of job satisfaction contains three criteria: being challenged by your work, having autonomy and receiving adequate rewards. The constraints of the teaching profession thwart satisfaction because of low salaries, isolation in the classroom rather than autonomy, routine and lack of change (Chapman 1982).

Some teachers in large schools may feel dissatisfied because they have no voice in decisions that affect their classrooms and their students. The structure of the schools reinforces the image of impotence; individuals who want to grow in status and power would not find teaching an attractive choice.

In the social climate of the times, altruistic reasons for choosing a career may seem foolish to many people. A society that emphasizes materialism and success does not place high value on a teaching career. Teaching may not be perceived as a respected career or as a means of social mobility and some teacher candidates themselves recognize the limitations of status, power and money.

Historically, teachers have affirmed altruistic motives such as the desire to work with children and serve society. They have had a sense of mission or calling as may be compared to a calling concerning religious vocations. It may take saintly qualities for an individual to choose a career that offers few material benefits, is perceived as dangerous and is not respected by the public or one's family.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Research is being conducted to determine the reasons students have chosen education as their profession. The information that you share will provide valuable data for this project and will remain in the strictest confidence. Your anonymous participation and voluntary cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Please indicate your answers to the following questions by marking the appropriate response.

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1.	Salary was the determining factor in my decision to become a teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have a teacher-parent who influenced my career decision.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I chose teaching because I want to have 3 months of vacation each year.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Teaching is a fairly easy job.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I have an important "other" in my life who as a teacher greatly influenced my decision.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I like children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I want to share my content area information with students.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	A former teacher influenced my decision to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Education requirements for graduation are less rigorous than those for other areas.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Teachers are adequately paid for what little they do.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Teaching is a highly respected profession.	1	2	3	4	5

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		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
12.	Teachers are not adequately compensated for the amount and type of work they do.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The decision to become a teacher was entirely my own.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Those who can do, those who can't teach.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Teaching is an awesome responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Teaching is an 8:30-3:00 job.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Graduation requirements in education are more strenuous than those in other areas.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The general public holds teachers in high regard.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Teaching is a demanding and exhausting job.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Teaching will give me an opportunity to use my creative abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	The teaching profession does not now enjoy the respect it once had.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Teaching will allow me to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Anyone can teach.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I like working with children and youth.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	The rewards of teaching are not monetary.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Teaching was my first career choice.	1	2	3	4	5

Research is being conducted to determine the reasons students have chosen education as their profession. The information that you share will provide valuable data for this project and your candid comments and personal identity will remain anonymous. Your participation and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Please discuss the factors influencing your decision to become a teacher.

THANK YOU !

APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 1

College students are apparently selecting teaching as their profession for altruistic reasons. Ninety six percent of the respondents state that they like children and like working with children. Ninety eight percent of the future teachers believe they will make a positive difference in the lives of children and that teaching will provide them the chance to use their creative abilities.

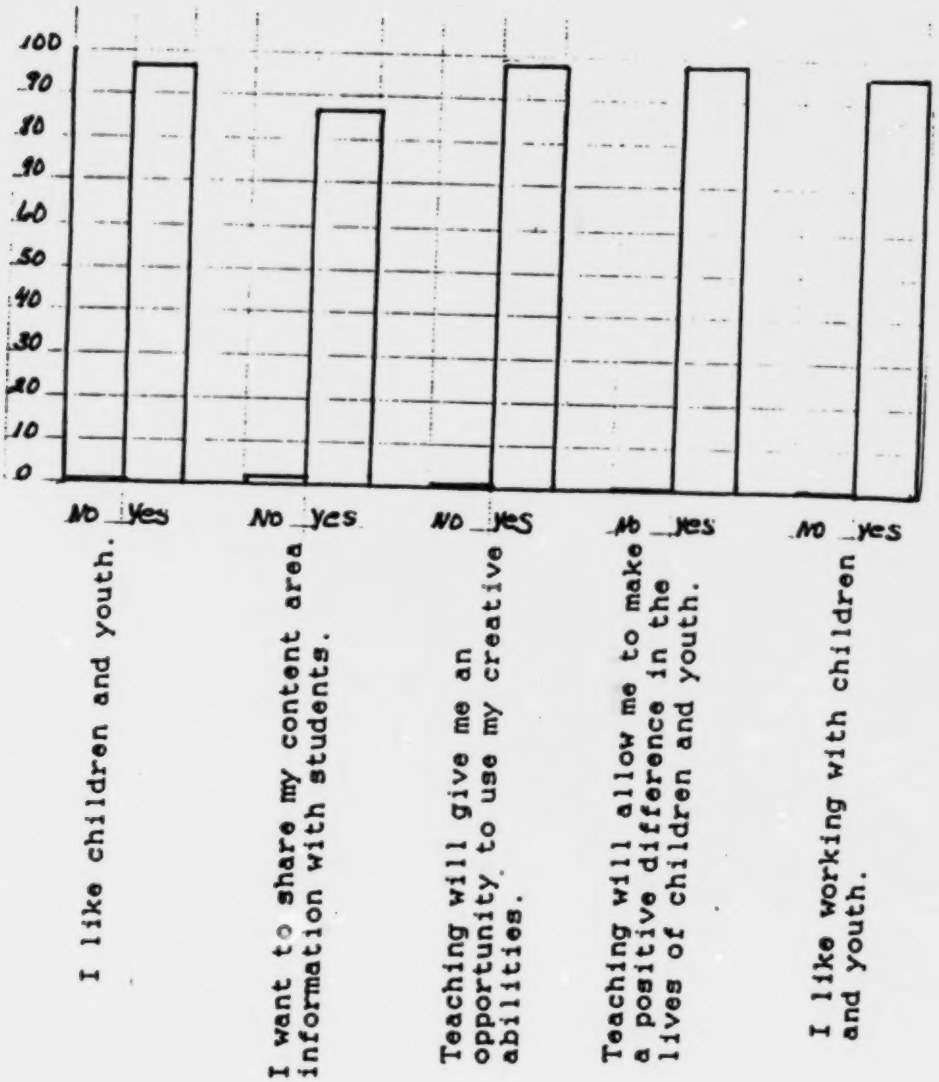


Figure 2

A high percentage of the education majors indicated that they feel teachers are not adequately paid for the work they do and that the rewards of teaching are not monetary.

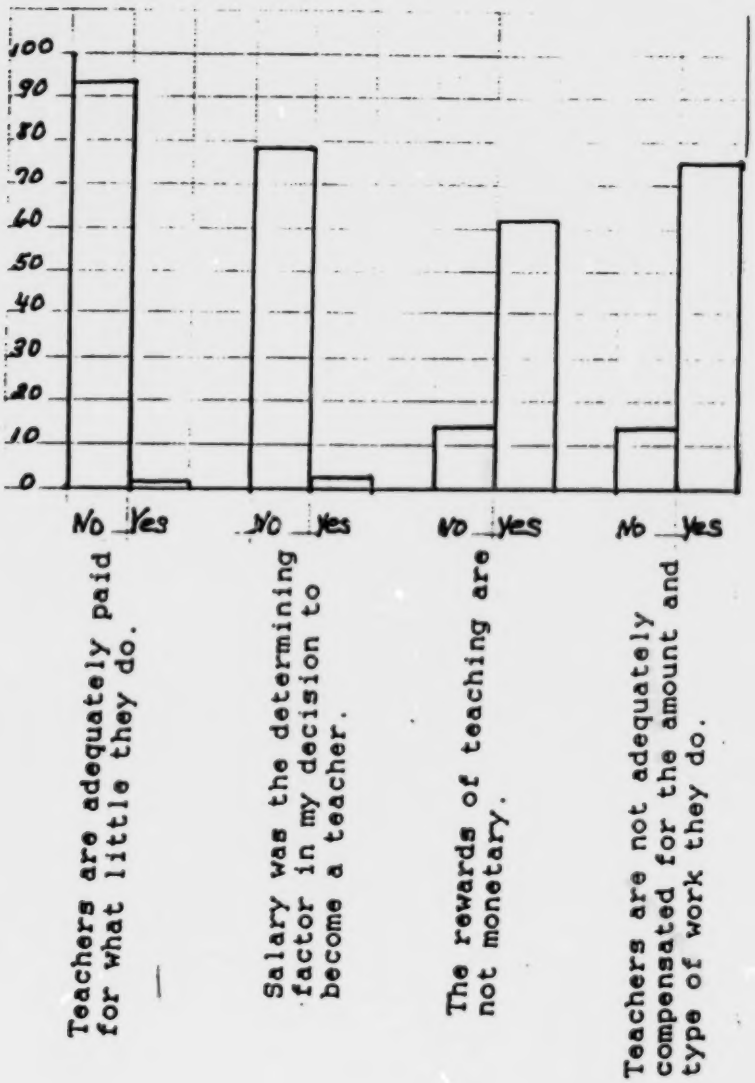
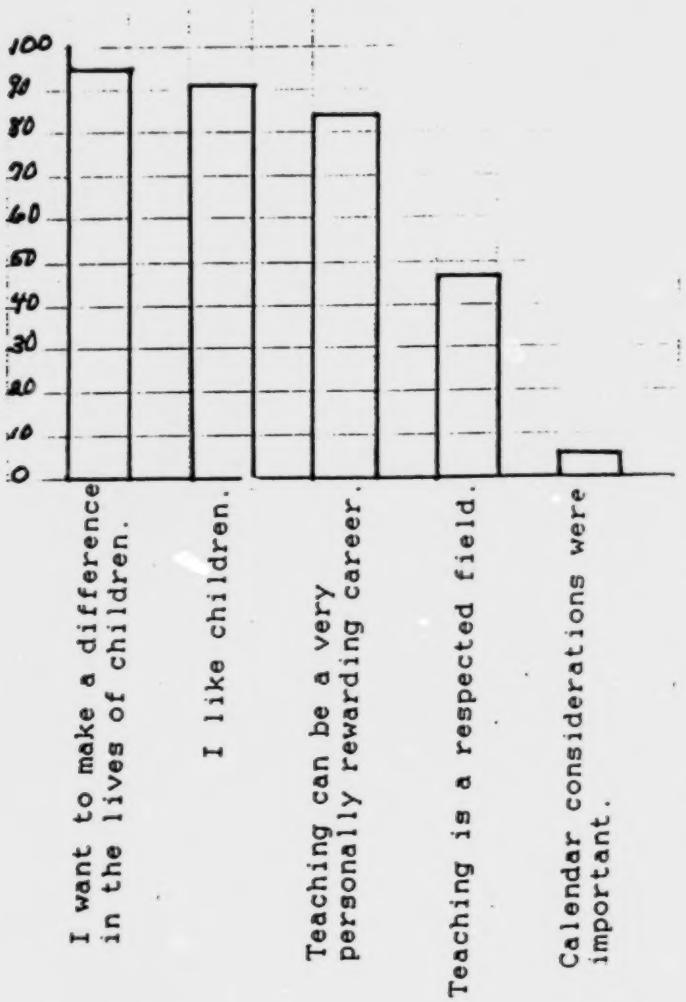


Figure 3

Twenty two of the twenty five open ended questionnaires given to education majors were completed and returned. The reasons given for choosing teaching as a career were varied but generally fell into five major categories. Ninety six percent of the respondents mentioned they believed they could make a difference in the lives of children. Ninety two percent stated their love of children was a determining factor and eighty four percent felt teaching to be a personally rewarding job. Forty six percent mentioned the importance of choosing a respected field. Calendar considerations were noted by five percent.



SURVEY RESULTS

Ninety three of the one hundred surveys given to education majors were completed and returned. The responses for each question are indicated in percentage figures to the right of the item.

		Strongly Disagree %		Strongly Agree %
1.	Salary was the determining factor in my decision to become a teacher.	79	18	3
2.	I have a teacher-parent who influenced my career decision.	52	16	32
3.	I chose teaching because I want to have 3 months of vacation each year.	58	30	12
4.	Teaching is a fairly easy job.	93	7	0
5.	I have an important "other" in my life who as a teacher greatly influenced my decision.	38	23	39
6.	I like children and youth.	0	4	96
7.	I want to share my content area information with students.	2	11	87
8.	A former teacher influenced my decision to teach.	19	27	54
9.	Education requirements for graduation are less rigorous than those for other areas.	84	10	6
10.	Teachers are adequately paid for what little they do.	92	7	1
11.	Teaching is a highly respected profession.	41	35	24
12.	Teachers are not adequately compensated for the amount and type of work they do.	13	12	75

		Strongly Disagree %		Strongly Agree %
13.	The decision to become a teacher was entirely my own.	8	32	60
14.	Those who can do, those who can't teach.	74	22	4
15.	Teaching is an awesome responsibility.	4	9	87
16.	Teaching is an 8:30-3:00 job.	93	5	2
17.	Graduation requirements in education are more strenuous than those in other areas.	14	52	34
18.	The general public holds teachers in high regard.	49	40	11
19.	Teaching is a demanding and exhausting job.	4	19	77
20.	Teaching will give me an opportunity to use my creative abilities.	1	1	98
21.	The teaching profession does not now enjoy the respect it once had.	3	39	58
22.	Teaching will allow me to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth.	0	2	98
23.	Anyone can teach.	88	8	4
24.	I like working with children and youth.	0	4	96
25.	The rewards of teaching are not monetary.	14	25	61
26.	Teaching was my first career choice.	29	27	44